How to develop an intranet strategy

Strategies can vary from one type of organisation to another. The size of an organisation has an impact too. A small start-up company with a close knit team will have a different approach to a global organisation with over 100,000 employees in many locations.

What makes sense for a large manufacturing company won’t necessarily work for a government body or a small business. Differences that influence this include purpose (online marketing company, charity or public sector) and complexity (global based in different time zones with many activities).

However there are some common factors that you need to apply to help you create a great intranet strategy, no matter what organisation you are in. There are some other factors to consider for digital workplace and SharePoint 2010 strategies which I cover in different sections.

Align your intranet strategy with your organisation’s strategy

You need to find out what your organisation’s strategy is. The direction your business is moving in is critical. Is it expanding or contracting? Is it dynamic and changeable or stable and consistent? Whatever it is, your intranet strategy must align with the overall strategy and show how it supports its achievement.

Your intranet strategy must have clear aims, show who is responsible for achieving them, how they will be done, and what measures will show it has succeeded.

How your intranet supports your organisation

You need to show what the biggest benefits your intranet provides to your organisation. Show the business functions that have the biggest impact on the success of your intranet strategy. It also needs to show the business functions that are most affected by your intranet strategy.

To do this you need to research what employees are using your intranet for. Find out how the existing content and tools help with their work. Ask what is missing that could help them work more productively. Find out what are the biggest barriers they feel stop them doing their work better.

Include long term priorities

Your intranet priorities need to be stretching and support your organisation’s success. They should be clear but not too detailed – an action plan can do that. So ‘Extend relevant standards to all intranet content and services’ is stretching and generic and not so specific as ‘Add this logo to the top right hand corner of xx pages with this colour and yy pixels in size’ would be.

You need to show how important your intranet is to achieving the organisation’s strategy. You need to show also how it will help. An intranet strategy should be looking at least 12 months into the future – around 3 years ideally – and explain how the organisation’s culture, values and plans will help.
Get stakeholders to approve your intranet strategy
You need to involve people who can make or break your intranet strategy and priorities. These are your key stakeholders who are vital to the success of your intranet. These will be senior people who represent large groups and/or heavy users of your intranet and decide on future investment.

Contact your senior business representatives, your stakeholders, to find out how strategically and operationally your intranet can help support their goals and improve performance. Choose the senior people of business units most affected by or have most influence on your intranet strategy. Try to avoid the ‘one representative from every business unit’ approach and focus on stakeholders from the key functions employees are involved with or work in that use your intranet.

Have the right culture and values
The intranet strategy needs to underpin the culture and values of your organisation and show how it helps to achieve these. For example openness and teamwork could be shown in your strategy by a focus on collaboration and standards that encourage these corporate values and how employees should behave.

A highly regulated and command driven from the board level type of organisation is likely to be resistant to sharing knowledge and to discourage the use of wikis. However an organisation that is flexible and receptive to new ideas and critical feedback is likely to encourage wikis and blogs and see them flourish and be part of your strategy.

It depends on your organisation’s culture for the best approach to adopt. In an open-minded, informal, dynamic organisation you can share your intranet strategy at an early stage for people to contribute and develop it. It encourages joint ownership and engages everyone. A wiki could be a great collaborative tool to use for this.

In a highly regulated and command driven organisation then it needs selective sharing and senior buy-in and approval first before being communicated more widely. A document that is managed with tight permissions on who can edit it with version control could be best here.

Digital workplace strategy

Alignment
It is vital that your digital workplace strategy is aligned with your organisation’s overall strategy. There is no point planning to invest time and resources to move in one direction if your organisation is going in the opposite way. You need to be clear what your organisations’ future plans are and make sure your strategy shows how it will help to achieve them.

Scope
A digital workplace strategy is wider than most intranet strategies. It’s more than the traditional role for information published online. It needs to also cover:

- where people will be working – mobile, home, cafes
- how everyone will be working – laptops, smartphones, public PCs
- what individuals will need for their work – processes, collaboration, email
**Priorities**
You need to have plans for the:

- short term (0 – 3 months)
- medium term (3 – 12 months)
- and long term (over 1 year)

You also need to prioritise the actions you plan to take based on what will benefit your organisation based on:

- Most people will benefit from
- Most savings for your organisation
- Quickest to implement

**Stakeholders**
You need to identify who will have the biggest influence on your strategy and who will be affected the most. They may be the same people! These are your stakeholders who you need to maintain good relationships with for your strategy to a) be implemented and b) have the greatest chance of succeeding.

They may be representing finance, your CEO (as well as your CEO), IT, HR and operational units.

**Resources**
Who apart from you is going to create, support and implement your digital workplace strategy? You will need a team of people, maybe a virtual team practicing digital workplace ways of working. As well as people you hopefully will have some budget which needs to be spent wisely so you can show the biggest gain from the money invested.

It is important you focus on the top priorities so you can achieve the maximum change with the resources you have.

**SharePoint 2010 strategy**
To gain the full benefits from your SharePoint2010 strategy it has to fit with your business’ overall strategy. This is no different in principle to creating an intranet strategy.

You need to be clear, very clear, on your business’ direction now and for the next two to three years. This gives you time to create a strategy with a plan for short team goals to be achieved.

You need to see how the business strategy focuses on areas that SharePoint 2010 can help you. These include:

- Discovering expertise in the organisation through content discovery
- Sharing knowledge across business units
- Increasing efficiency by enabling people working on similar projects to discover each other
- Reducing costs by rationalising the existing variety of technology platforms used

All of these are good reasons for your SharePoint 2010 strategy to align with your business strategy. SharePoint 2010 can contribute towards meeting these business needs and you can plan what action to take and the outcome to be achieved.
But it is not good enough to just deploy SharePoint 2010 because your IT strategy says so. What are the benefits to your business? How will it change the way people work?

My experience has shown you need to be bold and think big when creating a SharePoint 2010 strategy. It’s of little value to just change a small function, for example only changing the document management technology.

The full potential benefit has more chance of being achieved if you make major changes based on clear business need and the outcome is measurable and agreed by stakeholders.